



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • February 4, 2004

Report: Inflation Erodes Education Dollars

Impact of Legislative appropriations diminish over time

JUNEAU – A report released yesterday by Legislative Research confirms what school districts across Alaska already know: state classroom funding, measured in inflation-adjusted dollars, has fallen significantly in recent years.

“Every year the foundation formula is not increased, it’s a decrease in the spending power of classroom funding,” said Representative Mary Kapsner (D-Bethel). “Districts are under tremendous pressure to meet the new, underfunded federal No Child Left Behind and the state’s Department of Education requirements.”

The report responds to a research request by Representative Les Gara (D-Anchorage) discusses two measures of classroom funding: the total Kindergarten – 12th Grade general fund budget, and the per student allocation portion of the state’s “foundation formula.”

Anchorage School District Superintendent Carol Comeau says she can feel the effects: “Our experience in January of cutting \$26.2 million this year in instructional and other programs is a direct result of the lack of inflation-proofing of state education funds over the years, as well as a failure to provide adequate increases for new state and federal mandates. Our students deserve better than this.”

Since 1998, when the state's current formula for calculating funding was enacted, funding has fallen \$47.6 million behind inflation. When adjusted for inflation, Governor Murkowski's proposed budget for this coming year is \$35.2 million less than the 2002 (FY 2003) education budget. Additionally, Governor Murkowski proposes an \$8 million classroom funding cut from last year, only \$2 million of which reflects projected reductions in student enrollment.

Last year Reps. Gara and Kapsner proposed House Bills 220 and 222 to require that school funding keep up with inflation, and to add a 3.5 percent funding increase to make up for losses to inflation dating back to 1998. They will make similar attempts this year.

The House Special Committee on Education has named a subcommittee to consider these and other education funding measures. The subcommittee will meet on Thursday, February 5, starting at 12:30 p.m., and will take public testimony on the bills. Subcommittee members include Reps. Dan Ogg, Paul Seaton, and Gara.

For copies of the report and additional information, contact Rep. Gara at (888) 465-2647.

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